

singer, dies

Aidin Vaziri

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The original lineup of Jefferson Airplane, featuring singer Signe Toly Anderson.

Photo: Sony/Legacy

Signe Toly Anderson, the original female lead singer of the Jefferson Airplane, died at her home in Beaverton, Ore., on Thursday — the day the band's co-founder Paul Kantner died from multiple organ failure and septic shock in San Francisco. She was 74.

Her death was confirmed by her daughter, Onateska Ladybug Sherwood, who said Ms. Anderson had been suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

to San Francisco and joined the band shortly after it formed in 1965, providing vocals for its debut album, “Jefferson Airplane Takes Off,” most notably on the tracks “Chauffeur Blues” and “Let’s Get Together,” a song that would later become a hit for the Youngbloods.

By the summer of 1966, however, she married Merry Prankster Jerry Anderson and became pregnant with her first child. Deciding that touring life would be too difficult with a newborn, Ms. Anderson decided to leave.

She parted ways with the Jefferson Airplane after back-to-back performances on Oct. 15, 1966, at the Fillmore in San Francisco. A recording from those concerts was released in 2010.

“I want you all to wear smiles and daisies and box balloons,” Ms. Anderson said, bidding her fans farewell. “I love you all. Thank you and goodbye.”

She was replaced the following night by Grace Slick, who helped pilot the Jefferson Airplane to mainstream success with its next album, “Surrealistic Pillow,” which shifted to a harder, psychedelic sound.

Ms. Anderson “was a real sweetheart with a terrific contralto voice coming from a solid folk background,” Jack Casady, the group’s bassist, said in a message posted to Facebook. “Listen to how she made the three part harmonies of ‘JA Takes Off’ (first album) sound so thick ... her wonderful tone between Paul’s and Marty’s.”

Signe Toly was born Sept. 15, 1941, in Seattle. She was raised in Portland, where she got her musical education performing with jazz and folk combos.

Ms. Anderson moved back to Portland after leaving the Jefferson Airplane, working in a department store and singing occasionally with the big band Carl Smith and the Natural Gas Company.

She would also sit in with touring incarnations of Jefferson Starship and Airplane-related spinoff groups Hot Tuna and the KBC Band.

She divorced Anderson in 1975 and two years later married the local building contractor Michael Alois Ettlin, who died at age 62 in 2011.

strongest people I have ever met. She was our den mother in the early days of the Airplane ... a voice of reason on more occasions than one ... an important member of our dysfunctional little family.”

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